

Monday I'm in Love by VerityR

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Summary:

The day after the gate is closed, Nancy Wheeler still has to get up and go to school. And, despite the return to normalcy, she has a lot on her mind.

"To do:

Physics problem sets 1-10, 20-25.

Read Chaucer.

Ask Jonathan if we're dating now or what."

Monday I'm in Love

So. They'd saved the world. Again. Their mom had been pissed at her children's unexplained, prolonged absences. Again. And now, somehow, it was Monday and they were expected to go to school.

The Wheeler family's breakfast was mundane in its chaos that morning. Their father was going on a rant about the election, which Nancy had managed to completely forget was still happening in the midst of everything. Their mother nodded in distracted agreement, trying to sop up orange juice Holly had just spilled. The only thing that was off was the dark circles under the two eldest Wheeler children's eyes. If anyone noticed, they weren't commenting on it.

"Such bullshit," Mike muttered, lazily stabbing at his eggs.

"See, the boy knows!" their father boomed, somehow deluding himself that Mike was both listening to and agreeing with him.

"Language," their mother said, without much behind it. "Mike, please tell me you remembered your history paper this time."

"Yup," Mike lied, suddenly much more interested in his food.

"Michael," she warned, "If I have to get another call from—"

"You won't, Mom. God!"

It was almost impressive, Nancy had to admit. Usually she resented it, because Mike was lying about stealing her quarters or forgetting some chore, but he was truly a sight to behold. Nancy could tell her mother almost felt bad for accusing Mike of not doing homework he likely hadn't remembered even existed. A *tour de force*, truly.

Their father got up to pour his second cup of coffee, which meant it was probably— Nancy glanced at her watch— yes, *definitely* time to go.

"Off so soon?" her mother asked, now busy cutting up Holly's food.

"Catching the bus," Nancy explained, grabbing her bag. "See you

later.”

“No Steve today?”

“No Steve,” she repeated. Which was more than a fair summation. Kind of. Mike rolled his eyes.

But Nancy couldn't really bring herself to care. Sure, she'd have to talk to her mom eventually. Her father might be annoyed that he had wasted all that time pretending to be interested in Steve's collegiate aspirations (or lack thereof). It didn't seem to matter, when the trade off was being with Jonathan. Nancy had spent so much energy over the past year worrying about her perfect girlfriend act. Even at her most convincing, it hadn't made her anywhere near as happy as she'd been that night with Jonathan at Murray's.

Steve was the only third party who's feelings she was especially concerned about. Everyone at school thought she'd slept with Jonathan anyway. For so long, she hadn't wanted to play into their perception of her. And all that had done was make her miserable. It didn't make any of those assholes stop writing her number on the bathroom wall. From saying disgusting things to Jonathan or Steve that neither responded to, because they were, really, both good guys. Of course Nancy hadn't intended for Steve to become her collateral damage. But Nancy was so, so tired of being the version of herself she always had been with him.

No retreat. A new chapter was already beginning.

Tragically, however, that chapter was beginning with first period Physics, which was bad enough when she'd had a full night's sleep. Scrawling down formulas while Mr. Fischer zoomed through his lesson plan with over-caffeinated zeal had never seemed quite so unappealing.

A spring is an object...

Thirty minutes left in class. Ten minutes, three times. Five minutes, six times.

...that can be deformed by a force and then return to its original

shape after the force is removed.

She would see Jonathan second period, in English. Nancy found herself wondering, briefly—

$F = kX$, where k is a positive real number...

—if Jonathan had finished reading the prologue to *The Canterbury Tales* and, if so, if he'd explain it to her.

Stress is the force on unit areas within a material that develops as a result of the externally applied force.

Until, that is, she remembered that Jonathan had been by her side for the past 72 hours or so, and he'd spent exactly none of that reading Chaucer, unless he'd been sneaking it after she fell asleep.

Strain is the relative deformation produced by stress.

Which meant she was screwed (they were *both* screwed) if Mrs. McClain chose today to deploy that pop quiz she'd been threatening. Somehow, Nancy didn't think that explaining she'd spent her weekend conspiring to defame a shady government agency and exorcising her boyfriend's little brother would be a particularly convincing excuse.

Boyfriend. He was her boyfriend now, right? Maybe. Nancy considered making a note of it:

To do:

Physics problem sets 1-10, 20-25.

Read Chaucer.

Ask Jonathan if we're dating now or what.

Yeah, that didn't sound stupid at all.

Nancy liked to think of herself as practical. Rational. But she had to admit that when it came to... romance-y stuff, she was kind of a gigantic, clueless idiot.

For the rest of class, Nancy focused her practical, rational energies on

devising a pretty good structure (if she did say so herself) for an extra credit essay on *Wuthering Heights*. Provided, of course, that there was a pop quiz today. And that she failed it. And that Mrs. McClain took pity on her and let her make it up. Mercifully, this anxious academic spiraling was cut short by the bell. Nancy was out the door before the first bell had even ended. Embarrassingly eager, Nancy had arrived to class before even Mrs. McClain. She tried to recover by looking uninterested as the class filtered in.

Dawn, Cheryl, Andy. (She doodled a long, winding stem on a margin.) Greg, Dan, Bobby. (She topped it with rose blossom, bursting with petals.) Kevin, Julie, Terry. (She added a few leaves, complete with branching veins.) Tim, Paula, Mary, and Joel. Anna and Stacy and Tina and Alan. And that was it. No Jonathan. (She drew spiky thorns up and down the stem before appraising the completed image and scribbling the whole thing out.)

There was no reason to expect he'd be there, Nancy realized now. It wasn't like Mrs. Byers was in the dark about anything. Honestly, it'd be weirder if he were in school today. Mrs. Byers' boyfriend had just died. Will had almost died. Again. Jonathan's family needed him.

And I don't? It was an uncharitable thought that Nancy felt immediately guilty for having. Because she didn't need him. Not really. Not in the same way his mother and Will did. Jonathan didn't have to be strong for her. He could be, and he had been. But she'd done the same for him in return.

No. Nancy didn't need Jonathan. But she wanted him.

It's not like she'd had much time to test that theory, but Nancy was pretty sure there was a difference. And besides. There hadn't ended up being a pop quiz anyhow.

The day stretched on in its completely banal torture.

She made awkward, forced conversation with Allie at lunch. Nancy had the ridiculous impulse to reveal that Allie had recently served as her cover story. If only to see the look on her face.

Hey, guess what? I fucked Jonathan Byers this weekend. Yeah, my mom

thought I was at your place watching Flashdance, or whatever.

Instead, Nancy nodded as Allie explained the plot of the previous week's episode of *Dynasty* in excruciating detail. It seemed to have involved Joan Collins testifying in the murder trial of her ex-husband's new wife's ex-husband. Whatever. Nancy had always been more into *Dallas* anyway.

History, Calc, French: nothing. Snatches of her teachers' lecturing would reach her ears, but Nancy couldn't organize any of it into something resembling meaning. How were the Byers? Eleven? Hopper? Mike and his friends, that new girl with the horrible brother?

Nancy didn't have to wonder how Steve was. It had been inconvenient when they were dating, their mostly incompatible schedules. Now, even the one time they crossed paths as she walked to gym felt like far too much. Steve gave her a weak smile and a curt nod. Which she supposed she deserved.

What had he told his parents about all the bruises? What was he telling his friends? What were people saying? Nancy would have asked but... it wasn't exactly her place anymore. She had made it not her place. But you didn't stop worrying about someone overnight. You didn't stop wanting to edit their papers and go to their basketball games. But Nancy figured she had to. For at least a little while.

And as it turned out, she needn't have wondered what people were saying about Steve's face. Whoever was whispering in the locker room hadn't taken into account the room's acoustics.

"Steve looks bad, yeah," one of them said, maybe Tina. "But I heard he broke Byers' jaw. That's why the freak didn't show today."

"I so don't get it, she isn't even hot..."

"Uh, well she's easy, obviously."

There was no getting around it. Nancy had to walk past them. She bit the inside of her cheek and willed her locker to open quietly.

"If it isn't the princess herself," Carol simpered, strutting over, hand

on her hip. “Missed you in class Friday.”

Nancy sighed, stripping off her sweater and trading it for a T-shirt.

“Byers finally run out of cash for whatever slimy motel you ran off to?”

“Nah,” Nancy smiled. “You can get a very reasonable hourly rate.”

Carol faltered for a second, but recovered quickly.

“You know, I always knew you were a cheating slut, Nance, but I have to say I didn’t expect you to get so *flagrant* about it.”

“Nice SAT word.”

“What?”

“Flagrant,” Nancy explained. “Glad to see you’ve been studying.”

Carol blinked several times in rapid succession.

“I don’t know what you’re trying to— ”

“As much as I enjoy these little talks of ours, I do have to get to gym eventually.”

Nancy almost felt bad, as she elbowed past Carol. She didn’t have the energy for it, but still. A true knock-down, drag-out, teen-girl bitchfest might have made them both feel better.

But Nancy had to settle for the catharsis of dodge ball. She got put on the bleachers for aiming for Carol’s face, but it had been well worth it.

The second round, Carol very obviously got herself out on purpose, telling anyone who’d listen how much her nose hurt, glaring at Nancy all the while. While throwing projectiles at her classmates was fun for a while, Nancy honestly would’ve liked to do the same thing. Fake getting out, sit by the sidelines. But some weird sense of pride or competitiveness kept her in the game.

In the end, it was three against one. When the ball finally got her out, smacking her in the head, Nancy was almost giddy with relief. The rest of the day was only slightly more painful in comparison.

Mike hadn't fared much better, she learned when she got home. He'd cajoled his teacher into an extension, but still was in the unenviable position of trying to teach himself the nuances of the Articles of Confederation when he'd much rather be sneaking out to check on his super-powered girlfriend who'd been presumed dead for the better part of a year.

But he was clearly trying, sitting in the den and leafing through his textbook frantically. Nancy took pity on him.

"You're supposed to compare it to the Declaration of Independence."

Mike looked up at her with a sneer. "It doesn't *say*—"

"Sorry, which one of us has passed eighth grade history? Move over."

Much to Mike's chagrin, Nancy refused to write it for him. Instead, she made an outline and a list of figures and events he should be sure to mention. And then she made him write it in front of her.

"Could you not sit there and watch me?"

Nancy rolled her eyes. "When you get an A, my thanks had better be *effusive*."

"I literally have no idea what that means, you realize."

"Which is why I'm the one making the rules. Start writing."

An hour later, Mike had produced something that slightly resembled an essay, and Nancy felt the familiar glow of productivity.

"Except for the part where you don't know how to use a comma, this is pretty decent," Nancy said, going through the paper and making marks. "And you should get rid of all of those contractions."

Mike looked slightly baffled. "It's a *history* paper. They don't even care about grammar."

“That attitude,” Nancy said, flipping the page over, “is the difference between an A and a B.”

Mike sighed. “Thanks, I guess.”

Their mother chose that moment to walk into the room. “Michael! That’s so nice of you, thanking your sister.”

“You realize it’s totally sad that’s what passes for gratitude from him, right?”

Their mom just smiled. She knew what it looked like when her kids were getting along. However much they might protest.

“Enough studying, guys,” she said, clearly gleeful at the concept that Mike might start studying *too* much. “Dinner’s up.”

After dinner, Nancy returned to her to do list. She did the problem sets. She read the Chaucer. She considered the third item on her list.

Ask Jonathan if we’re dating now or what.

Nancy knew it wasn’t the sort of thing you asked over the phone. If it was the kind of thing you asked at all.

Nancy sighed, turning over on her bed to face the pastel blue phone she’d picked out five years ago. She couldn’t help missing Barb at moments like this. Moments when it became painfully clear that she no longer had a best friend. Friends to talk to in class, yeah. Friends to go to the movies with, sure. But no one whose advice she could ask for without feeling needy or stupid.

Though maybe that wasn’t true. Steve had been that, sort of. But when your best friend was your boyfriend, you had no one to talk to about your boyfriend. Maybe that had been part of the problem. In theory, having one person to cling to was romantic. In practice, you ended up staying with them way longer than you should’ve out of a sense of obligation. Or loneliness. Or co-dependence.

What Nancy knew for sure, though, was that you couldn’t ask your ex-boyfriend/best friend for advice on your new non-boyfriend.

Now that she thought about it, actually, Nancy was a little surprised Mike hadn't asked her what the deal was. She'd made her allegiances pretty clear last night (partially at Steve's behest, not that anyone else knew that). It could be that after a year of pining, her brother had learned a thing or two about the messiness of relationships. The idea made her a little sad. It seemed that nice, normal relationships weren't in the cards for either Wheeler sibling.

A breeze disrupted this train of thought, while Nancy moved to shut her window. How had Steve gotten in and out that way so many times? She peered out the sill. It wasn't too far down, actually. It wouldn't even be the scariest thing she'd done in the past twenty four hours.

Once the idea was in her head, there was no fighting it. Not over the phone, but in person. She took a flashlight. She took Mike's bike.

Now we're even, she thought, grimly, as she adjusted the gears. Whatever revenge Mike would want to enact if he found out Nancy had taken his bike, it would have nothing on the pitch black ride to the Byers house. It didn't help that Nancy couldn't remember the last time she'd rode a bike. And despite what people say, there was a bit of a learning curve. Especially when said bike was intended for a boy smaller than you.

The dark shouldn't scare her after everything. But it was almost nice that it still could.

It was nicer, though, when she reached Jonathan's house. She laid the bike carefully in the bushes and rapped on his bedroom window.

When Jonathan appeared, she thought he almost looked guilty.

"I was going to call," he said quickly, opening the window and holding out his hand to let her climb in.

"So was I," Nancy admitted, as she grappled her way through.

"But instead you came over," Jonathan observed, not looking particularly upset about it.

"I biked, yeah." Nancy grinned. "I missed you."

"I saw you less than twenty four hours ago." He was smiling as he said it.

She nodded. "Both things are true."

It was then he kissed her (finally), picking her up and dropping her on his bed (*finally*).

"I missed you, too," Jonathan said, the sound somewhat muffled as he kissed her neck.

As Nancy snaked her arms around his waist, she was struck with the knowledge that this was the first time they'd been together with no sword of Damocles hanging over them. She wanted to pause the moment and live in it forever, counting all his ribs under her hands, memorizing his mouth on her hers.

"How was... today?" Nancy asked, slightly breathless.

"Uh," Jonathan's expression was serious, even as he was straddling her. "Shitty."

She nodded, running her fingers through his hair.

"It's just kind of hard to believe," —Jonathan leaned into Nancy's touch, until he was no longer on top of her, but leaning on her shoulder, their legs intertwined— "that, I don't know. That this time it'll actually..."

"Go back to normal?" Nancy suggested.

He kissed her collarbone. "Something like that."

"I guess we have to get over it," she said, a hand still absent-mindedly stroking his hair.

Jonathan raised an eyebrow.

"This idea that there's a normal to go back to," Nancy explained. "Now that it's, like, a pattern and not one random occurrence you can ignore."

“People ignore patterns all the time,” he pointed out.

Nancy thought about this for a moment, and for the first time paused long enough to realize that being in Jonathan’s bed like this should strike her as at least a little bit weird. Or new, at least. But it already felt as familiar as his hands on her, tracing patterns over her upper arm, her palm, the scar that they shared.

“Well, I don’t want to, at least,” Nancy declared. “Things aren’t normal: I’ve made my peace with it.”

Jonathan laughed.

“Does that include this?”

“Maybe technically.” She’d shrug, if his head weren’t on her shoulder. “I don’t know. This feels normal.”

“Somehow I must’ve forgotten about all the other times you’ve thrown rocks at my window.”

She poked him in the ribs. “I did *not* throw rocks. Is that supposed to be some sickening Juliet reference?”

“That’d make you Romeo, actually,” Jonathan said, grinning. Nancy refused to dignify that with an answer, shaking her head and trying desperately not to laugh.

“Maybe not normal as in, ‘a thing we have done a bunch of times’,” she amended, after a minute. “Normal as in, this doesn’t feel weird.”

“Natural,” he supplied.

“Natural.” As the knot in her chest unravelled, fresh guilt crept in. It shouldn’t be all about her. Them.

“So, your mom... Will... ?”

Jonathan sighed, brushing his thumb over her knuckles.

“Mom’s been keeping busy fussing over Will. And Will has been asleep, mostly. But when he goes back to school, I’m not really sure

what she'll do with herself."

"Well... " Nancy frowned, thinking of asking about the burn she inflicted on Will. When his mother and brother were paralyzed by love, she was the one who acted. Nancy Wheeler was never a slave to her emotions. She was always the one wielding the hot poker.

None of that seemed like it'd be especially helpful for Jonathan to hear.

"Your mom is strong. And she has you." Nancy nudged his calf with her foot. "And you have me."

Jonathan didn't answer. His breathing turned slow, and his head fell slack. Certain he was asleep, Nancy started toying with the idea of figuring out his alarm clock, getting some sleep, and biking back home in the morning before anyone woke up.

But Jonathan hadn't been sleeping. Or if he had, he was awake now.

"Nancy?"

"Mhm?"

"I think this is probably going to throw off your thing about this not being weird, and you don't have to say anything back," Jonathan said all of this very quickly, like she was going to kick him out of his own bed at any moment. "But I'm in love with you. So... I just wanted to say that."

"Oh."

"You really don't have to— "

"Shut up." Nancy felt herself flushing. "I'm in love with you, too."

"Oh."

Nancy turned and buried her face in his chest. "Now set your alarm for 5 AM."

She was cold without him there, and made her way under his sheets

as he dutifully set an alarm. But he came back to her, draping an arm carelessly around the small of her back, passing out almost immediately. She tried to match her breathing with his, and found it much easier than she would have thought. And Nancy realized, just as consciousness started slipping away, that she had lost track of the times she'd fallen asleep next to Jonathan Byers.

Author's Note:

Post season 2 fic! Happy days! Random physics babble courtesy (read: shamelessly lifted) from Khan Academy, Encyclopedia Britannica, and good ol' Wikipedia. It's still probably inaccurate, as I slept through most of the first period physics class I took in high school. The plot summary of that week's Dynasty, however, is completely accurate.

Remember kids: don't throw dodge balls at anyone's head, and do thank your siblings when they edit your papers.

Works inspired by this one:

- [Tuesday's Grey](#) by [Storybook_Wolf](#)